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Statement on the Hearing Held June 29, 2017 in the Matter of Phillips v. Archdiocese of Newark et al

June 30, 2017

The following is a statement from James Goodness, Vice Chancellor and Director of Communications for the Archdiocese of Newark.

We are disappointed that the court yesterday declined to recognize that a private, religious-affiliated school has the right to govern itself according to its own rules and practices. The Archdiocese and St. Theresa School have provided more than sufficient precedent in case law from New Jersey and elsewhere in the country, as well as certifications from members of the hierarchy of the Archdiocese and parish, to support such a finding.

However, we are hopeful that the court ultimately will conclude the obvious – that the decisions that St. Theresa School has made in this matter are solely within the rights of the Catholic Church as protected by the First Amendment, were made according to its particular laws and rules, and were made for the greater benefit of students and families of the St. Theresa community.

At the same time, we are optimistic that the court next week will dismiss the plaintiffs' request to expand their lawsuit to include as defendants in this case some 80 individuals – mostly parents of St. Theresa School students. By this action, the plaintiffs have sought to punish individuals for exercising on social media their Constitutionally-guaranteed right to express an opinion that the plaintiffs' lawsuit and actions are harming both the students of St. Theresa School and the school's reputation as an excellent Catholic school.

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